

To:
Charlie Grant
Head of Unit
Directorate General – Regional Policy
European Commission
B – 1049 Brussels
Belgium

5300 Gabrovo
Bulgaria

4th June, 2010

Dear Mr. Grant,

Subject: New information concerning the planning and implementation of the Gabrovo by-pass project in Bulgaria (subject of Petition N 1532 /2008 to the EC).

We refer to your letter as of 26th November, 2009 (ref. N 011131) in which you ask us to share with you any new information concerning the Gabrovo by-pass project.

We are writing this letter in order to share some new and important information about the project in question:

As you know, in our petition we insist on alteration of part of the by-pass route, as there are other alternatives, thus it will not pass through living quarters and will not deteriorate people's living environment.

In fact, the Gabrovo by-pass road is the main connection to the Shipka tunnel (a tunnel through the Balkan mountains below the Mount Shipka), a project plan of the Infrastructure Agency. We have acquired the information that 4.3 km of the Gabrovo by-pass road extension as well as the whole tunnel are on territory included in Nature 2000 and more precisely Nature Park Bulgarka. That territory is also a main water source of the town of Gabrovo. That fact has been hidden from the public until now, though a number of NGO and ecological ones have been warning the present and previous governments as well as the local authorities.

Despite these facts, there was an announcement of the project approval on 21st April, 2010 in the local paper and the article mentions some departures from the ecological norms. It is also stated that the project has received a report of assessment of ecological impact, which surprised us as there have never been any consultations with the affected community, as it is required by the Law.

On 1st June, the National Radio released an announcement in its news bulletin that 80 000 euros will be granted to Bulgaria for infrastructural projects under the Operational Program "Transport", 50 000 of which will be used for funding the Gabrovo by-pass projects. That was confirmed in an article in the local paper on the next day, 2nd June.

We are filled with indignation that the decisions in favour of certain projects are imposed administratively, without consulting with the affected communities or the general public, especially in the projects early stage.

We also suspect that behind all those hard efforts there are only strong commercial interests. We feel that all that is done with the only purpose to use European funds. A proof of that are the many a publications in the papers insisting on the start of expropriation and compensation procedures.

We believe that this information will lead to a whole new concept for the by-pass road and the Shipka tunnel, with the active involvement of the general public and the affected communities.

Yours truly,

Nikolay Nikolov

Ivan Denchev

/Representatives of the Initiative Committee/